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FO 371/137337

Reports received in the last few days from the British Missions in Moscow, Berlin and Bonn have put forward various views about Khrushchev's motives and intentions regarding Berlin. These views are set out in the Annex to this memorandum.

2. The views of the Foreign Office are as follows:

- (i) One of Khrushchev's main motives in making this move now has to do with his belief that the Americans are on the point of supplying the West German forces with nuclear weapons and that it may not be too late to prevent them. He may hope that by creating an atmosphere of crisis and danger about Berlin he will be able to produce a climate of opinion in the West favourable to high-level discussions about the future of Germany including no doubt the new version of the Rapacki Plan. This new version contains two phases, under the first of which the governments concerned would undertake not to introduce nuclear weapons into the armies of those countries in the "Rapacki" area which do not already possess them. The first objective of the new version is thus to prevent the Germans from receiving nuclear weapons. Soviet and Polish interests and emotions are obviously united on this point. Khrushchev probably calculates that if he can create a scare in Western public opinion about the danger of war arising from the situation in Berlin this will make it more difficult for the Western governments to turn down suggestions for high-level talks about Germany including the new Rapacki Plan or to persist in their policy of arming the Germans with nuclear weapons.
- (ii) Another prominent motive, in which, however, there is nothing new, must be to build up the D.D.R. as an independent state in the hope of ultimately forcing the Western governments to recognise it. He wants them to recognise it in order that the whole satellite empire should be consolidated and in order that Poland in particular should be imprisoned within the status quo.
- (iii) It would be foolish not to proceed on the assumption that Khrushchev is going to do more or less what he has said that he is going to do, i.e. that sooner or later he will "hand over to the sovereign German Democratic Republic those functions in Berlin which are still maintained by Soviet organs". We cannot stop him from doing this. The main question for us to decide is therefore how to react when he does it. We can say in public, as we have said, that the Soviet Government cannot unilaterally abrogate their responsibilities with regard to Berlin in the sense that they do not have the right to do this, but the fact is that they can in practice do precisely this at any moment they choose.

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- (iv) In considering our action we must naturally proceed from the basis that we will under no circumstances withdraw our forces from Berlin or abandon the West Berliners whom we are pledged to support. In the Declaration of October 1954 we said that we would treat any attack against Berlin as an attack upon ourselves. This implies that rather than submit to Berlin being starved out, if it ever came to that, we would resort to force with all the risks that this might entail. The Foreign Office believes that the French and Americans will agree that we must proceed on this assumption that this must be the ultimate basis of our policy and that any suggestion that we might weaken on this would be as fatal to NATO as it could be disheartening, and that we should be prepared to make our position once again publicly plain.
- (v) But if the Soviet Government carry out their announced intention, the immediate issue will be whether to submit to dealing on practical matters relating to transport and communications with representatives of the D.D.R. in the same manner in which we have hitherto dealt with the Soviet authorities. Facilities for German civilian traffic between West Germany and Berlin are already provided by the East German authorities. The Federal authorities and the West Berlin authorities already deal with them de facto. Civilian traffic would in theory therefore be unaffected by the withdrawal of the Soviet authorities. All that would be affected would be allied official and military traffic. There would be no difficulty in staging a "miniature airlift" to take care of allied official and military requirements. But if we decided to do this rather than deal with the East German authorities about this official and military traffic there is a strong probability that the Soviet Government would tell the East German authorities to put the screws on the German civilian traffic which they control. In short a refusal by the Allied Governments to deal with the East German authorities could precipitate a new blockade of Berlin which might in the last resort have to be broken by force. Our decision must partly depend on the calculation we make of our ability to stage a successful airlift and to continue to ensure it indefinitely. As explained in paragraph 3 below, our preliminary examination of the technical problems involved suggests that we would not repeat not be able to supply Berlin by airlift for much more than a year. On the assumption that this is a correct calculation the real long-term choice would lie between dealing with the D.D.R. authorities and using force. A half-way possibility would be to warn the Soviet Government that, rather than deal with the D.D.R. authorities we would use force (in the hope that they would think better of their decision and would resume responsibility for Berlin sooner than risk a war). But such a course, apart from having a doubtful chance of success, would itself imply that as between dealing with the D.D.R. authorities

resorting to force we had already made our choice in favour of the latter. It is therefore not really a true alternative. The main argument against choosing to deal with the D.D.R. authorities is that this would bring us rapidly on to a slippery slope at the end of which would lie full and formal recognition of the D.D.R., i.e. that the D.D.R. Government might make it a condition that we should recognise them before authorising their representatives to enter into practical arrangements with us over transport and communications. As between agreeing in practice that we should deal with representatives of the D.D.R. and submitting to the eventual necessity of resorting to some act of force to break a blockade, it would seem clearly to be in our interest to choose the first alternative. To do so would not necessarily imply that we would also prefer to accord full recognition to the D.D.R. rather than resort to force. It would therefore seem worth while to try to work out a set of rules for our authorities which would enable them when the time came to deal with the D.D.R. authorities without implying that this action constituted recognition of the D.D.R. Government and while maintaining the theory that the Soviet authorities remained responsible. In many ways it would make things much easier if we could be relieved of the inhibition which has hitherto prevented our authorities from having any dealings with the D.D.R. authorities at all. But we ought not to be under any illusion that such a modus vivendi would be allowed to operate for very long, if at all. The slippery slope might prove to be a steep one. We would in all probability soon find ourselves faced with the further choice of recognising the D.D.R. or exposing Berlin, to a blockade which would in the last resort have to be broken by force. Khrushchev has probably calculated that if that choice presented itself we would prefer to recognise the D.D.R. So far as the United Kingdom is concerned, he would be right. He is not trying to evict us from Berlin by force nor is he likely to try because he knows that force will be met by force. But he is manoeuvring us into a position in which we shall have to choose between an eventual resort to force and the recognition of the D.D.R. which he must know that nobody in the West would believe to be worth a war.

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Put more shortly it looks as though we may be faced with having to choose between

- (a) abandoning Berlin;
- (b) resorting to force;
- (c) staying in Berlin but dealing with and, if necessary, ultimately recognising the D.D.R.

Khrushchev has for a long time been in a position to oblige us to make this choice. He must have known for a long time that the airlift possibilities are limited. There is no point in speculating why he /should

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should have waited until now to make use of his weapon of pressure. He may have chosen this moment because he has sensed a softening in the attitude of the Federal Government. The Bundestag resolution and the subsequent discussions about it in Germany will have been evidence of this. Or as suggested above the prospect of the German army being supplied with nuclear weapons may have given a new edge to his desire to force the Federal Republic out of NATO. He may suppose that an increase in the status of the D.D.R. would be a step towards this end (though there is in fact no logical or immediate connection between the one and the other). Whatever the explanation it is plain that course (a) is out of the question and that course (c) is greatly to be preferred to course (b).

3. The Foreign Office believes that it may be impossible indefinitely to sustain a blockade of Berlin for the following reason: existing airlift plans take account of the fact that because of the improvement in Soviet radar techniques it would probably be impossible for aircraft to fly during the hours of darkness. On the other hand they also allow for greater capacity of transport aircraft. The plans are based on certain assumptions as to the facilities which the Federal Government would be willing and able to provide, assumptions which have not yet been confirmed. The plans make very liberal assumptions as to the quantity of transport aircraft which could be made available from military and civilian sources by the United States, France and the United Kingdom. All these factors being taken into account, the calculation is that about 4,000 metric tons a day could be supplied to Berlin. There are now stocks of solid fuel in the city sufficient to last for one year. If 4,000 tons a day of supplies were flown in this would enable the city to keep going quite well, but only provided that none of the tonnage was allotted to solid fuel. Soon after a year had elapsed therefore we would run into immediate difficulties. These could only be mitigated by an immensely stepped up effort in terms of quantities of aircraft which is probably unrealistic to contemplate. There could be some replenishment of coal stocks during the year but only at the expense of other supplies. It looks at first sight extremely unlikely that a blockade could be resisted for longer than about fifteen months. This is of course a very general estimate of the position, and it may well be that by ingenuity and effort this time period could be much further extended. Nevertheless it would seem prudent to accept this estimate as sufficiently accurate for political planning purposes. Instructions are being sent to Her Majesty's Embassy in Bonn.

- (i) to push on with the negotiations with the Federal authorities about the facilities which would be required from them in the event of an airlift;
- (ii) to concert estimates with their United States and French colleagues of the requirements of a "miniature airlift" for purely military purposes.

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4. The financial aspect of a renowned airlift, and the contribution which the Federal Government might in present circumstances make to it, will require further consideration.
5. The Foreign Office would be glad to know whether the State Department agree with this analysis.

BRITISH EMBASSY,

WASHINGTON D.C.

November 17, 1958.